

# FOUNTAIN HILLS STRATEGIC PLAN

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## Fountain Hills Town Council (2010)

Jay T. Schlum, Mayor  
Cassie Hansen, Vice Mayor  
Mike Archambault  
Dennis Brown  
Dennis Contino  
Ginny Dickey  
Henry Leger

## Strategic Planning Advisory Commission (2010)

Audra Koester Thomas, Chair  
Curt Dunham, Vice Chair  
Mike Dooley  
Alan Magazine  
Charlotte McCluskey  
Katie Myhr  
Rich Shultz  
Allen Siebel

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## MAYOR'S MESSAGE

On behalf of the involved citizens and the Fountain Hills Town Council, I am pleased to introduce the *Town of Fountain Hills Strategic Plan 2010*.

From its earliest beginnings, Fountain Hills has grounded the vision for its future on the input and aspirations of its citizens. In 2004-2005, the first Strategic Plan was crafted over an 18-month process involving thousands of hours of work with volunteer professionals and the input of more than 2,000 residents and stakeholders. This first formal Plan for the future of Fountain Hills called for the creation of the Strategic Planning Advisory Commission (SPAC) to assure that the annual goals and priorities set by Council and Town staff were consistent with the Strategic Plan, and to provide on going education and public dialogue opportunities.

In early 2009, the SPAC began the process of gathering public input to update the Plan's vision, confirm residents' values, and create a fresh structure for the Strategic Plan revision. Subsequently, *Strategic Plan 2010* is built upon the foundation of a clearly defined vision statement and eight key values, with specific indicators to evaluate Council and staff priorities. Based on citizen input, the Strategic Plan is designed to guide our future decisions grounded on these common values:

- Civility
- Civic Responsibility
- Environmental Stewardship
- Economic Vitality
- Education, Learning and Culture
- Maintain and Improve Community Infrastructure
- Public Safety, Health and Welfare
- Recreational Opportunities and Amenities

*Strategic Plan 2010* honors and continues the Fountain Hills tradition of citizen-driven planning. Some of the goals will span decades, so it is essential that the updated Plan provides both long-range direction to achieve our vision yet have the flexibility to implement the latest and best technologies and strategies as opportunities arise.

Fountain Hills is truly the best place to live in Arizona, and we are confident that the Strategic Plan provides the roadmap for an even better future for our Town. Thanks to all who participated in this essential part of our culture of planning, and for your efforts to ensure a bright future for the Town of Fountain Hills.



Mayor Jay T. Schlum

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2010

## Process

Fountain Hills developed its first Strategic Plan in 2005 through a citizen-driven planning process. *Strategic Plan 2006-2010* outlined strategic priorities for implementation through 2010. *Strategic Plan 2006-2010* also established the Strategic Planning Advisory Commission (SPAC), a Council-appointed body intended to foster implementation of the Strategic Plan.

At the beginning of 2009, SPAC recognized the need to update the Strategic Plan. In the spring, SPAC Commissioners initiated a reconnaissance effort to learn from the public and stakeholders the successes of *Strategic Plan 2006-2010* and to identify opportunities for the update. SPAC met in a joint session with Council to present a public participation plan to update the Strategic Plan that would maintain the culture of citizen involvement, but that was economically prudent.

Council endorsed and SPAC led the four-phased program:

Phase I: Strategic Plan Audit (Working Paper I: Strategic Plan Gap Analysis)

Phase II: Visioning (Working Paper II: Visioning Report)

Phase III: Construction (Draft Strategic Plan 2010)

Phase IV: Plan Adoption (Adopted Strategic Plan 2010)

Over the course of ten months, SPAC facilitated the following activities:

- Organized a Planning Team to monitor its progress at key milestones
- Met with dozens of organizations and social groups
- Solicited feedback online and using paper feedback forms
- Invited the public to join in discussing the future desires for our community at Issue Forums
- Met with Town Council and each Town Commission
- Spent a day at Fountain Hills High School and asked children at the Boys & Girls Club what they want for the future
- Met and worked with all of Town's professional staff
- Held traditional public meetings and communicated through area newspapers

In total, the process included contributions and discussions from approximately 2,000 people and resulted in a more focused vision for the Town's future built upon our core values. While specific implementation strategies will be developed annually through Council's goal setting activities and the budget process, progress towards achieving the vision will be monitored through performance measures.

## How will the Strategic Plan be used?

A successful strategic plan is one that is integrated into the daily operations of an organization. In a municipal setting, staff and partner organizations use the strategic plan to develop proposals and initiatives that implement elements of the strategic plan; Council uses the strategic plan to evaluate all proposals.

While a full update of a Strategic Plan is recommended periodically (every five years), the Strategic Plan should be reviewed annually and adjustments made as necessary. The following cycle outlines the annual use of the Strategic Plan:



### Fall

- SPAC reviews previous fiscal year achievements, recommends any potential Strategic Plan revisions to Council, and provides recommendations for future goals/action plan
- Council considers revisions to Strategic Plan
- Council sets annual goals

### Winter

- Staff outlines annual action plan based on Council goals

### Spring

- Council passes budget based on action plan

### Summer

- Staff monitors implementation of Strategic Plan
- Staff develops annual achievements report reflecting implementation of the Strategic Plan (based on previous year budget/action plan/goals)

## Strategic Plan Format

The foundation of the Strategic Plan is the citizen-crafted vision and values. The decisions of Town Council and its partners should all work towards achieving that future vision while honoring the Towns' values.

### Focus Areas

The eight community-driven values serve as the 'focus areas' for the Town's strategic direction. By design, the Strategic Plan does not address all of the Town's core functions and activities nor will the Strategic Plan serve as the only tool used to allocate resources or evaluate programs.

Each focus area is constructed in the following manner:

**❶ Why this is important:** A statement describing the value identified by the public and what challenges or concerns the focus area is intended to address.

**❷ Pledge:** A statement of commitment or 'pledge' to our community.

**❸ Strategic Directions:** These are guiding principles identified to achieve the pledge, and ultimately, fulfill the vision. These are intended to provide guidance to Town leaders; staff and Town partners will develop more specific 'tactical' actions (see: Appendix - Idea Box).

**❹ Key Performance Questions:** These are high-level questions used to identify what measures have been taken each year to forward the strategic direction. Answers to these questions will serve as a tool in reporting annual accomplishments.

Fountain Hills Strategic Plan 2010

### CIVILITY

**❶ Why is this important?**  
Residents value the friendly atmosphere in Fountain Hills; they love running into neighbors on a walk and being greeted by name at area merchants. Residents also value civility—while we encourage lively debate and engagement on a range of issues, we also expect to be treated with respect. Our community is one that values kindness and we should strive to celebrate and build upon our differences instead of finding ways to fragment ourselves and politicize the issues facing our community.

**❷ Our Pledge**  
We will build a community in which all can feel valued, welcome and as though they belong.

**❸ Strategic Directions**

- Practice the art of civility in all public settings and encourage those around you to do the same.
- Support community events and activities that create opportunities to build community and friendship.
- Genuinely solicit and consider public and stakeholder feedback as part of the decision-making process.
- Establish Fountain Hills as the friendliest place in the Valley.

**❹ Key Performance Questions**

- What is the overall atmosphere at public meetings and gatherings?
- Did we expand events and activities that build community and friendship?
- Can we make connections between public and stakeholder feedback and the decisions that have been made?
- Have we made positive strides in establishing Fountain Hills' reputation as the friendliest place in the Valley?

## Idea Box

While the Strategic Plan itself is intended to provide broad strategic guidance, each year Council will provide more specific direction on its annual course which will be used by staff to develop an action plan. The action plan will outline specific initiatives, strategies and projects that Council and its partners will pursue that year to implement the Strategic Plan and to realize the community vision.

Through the planning process, residents, stakeholders and staff generated numerous ideas as to how the Town can implement portions of the Strategic Plan. The Idea Box section of the plan is a collection of these specific ideas offered and is reflective of public feedback received. These ideas are presented neither with endorsement nor evaluation by the Town. The Idea Box is intended to serve as a repository of tools and activities that can be considered to build the Town's annual action plan.

The Idea Box is in no way inclusive of all potential implementation strategies; SPAC encourages Town leaders, residents, partners, stakeholders, and staff to continue to build this coffer of ideas, and employ as appropriate.

## Foundation for Success: Financial Sustainability

The fundamental element of the Town's continued success is its financial health and security. The Town of Fountain Hills General (operating) Fund is fueled primarily through two revenue sources: local sales taxes and state shared revenues. Fountain Hills already has one of the highest combined sales tax rates in Arizona (9.9%). State shared revenues are those that state government allocates to towns and cities based on each municipality's relative share of total population. As Fountain Hills reaches build-out, Town revenue streams will continue to diminish as sales tax and permit fees from new construction dwindle and communities within Arizona grow at a faster pace than Fountain Hills, and thus, take a higher percentage of state shared revenues.

The *Strategic Plan 2006-2010* warned that continued reliance on these diminishing revenue sources would impact the Town. As such, the first strategic priority outlined as part of *Strategic Plan 2006-2010* was "Government Financial Stability," specifically directing Council to resolve the Town's projected long-term revenue shortfall by December 31, 2007. As part of that effort, SPAC led a citizen-driven "Revenue Solutions" process in 2007 to thoroughly analyze potential revenue alternatives and recommend a course of action. In 2008, voters soundly rejected the proposed solution that would have instituted a local primary property tax to reduce the Town's reliance on sales taxes while lowering the sales tax rate.

The concerns about the Town's vulnerability to an economic downturn were enunciated during the *Strategic Plan 2006-2010* effort and those concerns have now been validated at a greater magnitude than predicted five years ago.

The current economic recession has magnified the impact of the Town's unbalanced fiscal portfolio. High unemployment rates, home foreclosures and the crash of the construction industry have led to reduced spending statewide and a lowering of revenues to almost all government agencies in Arizona. The State of Arizona is even threatening to siphon off other locally-shared revenues as it tries to close its deficit of over \$1 billion.

Everyone has tightened belts. The Town's fiscal year (FY) 2005-2006 General (operating) Fund revenues were \$17.2 million. Currently, Town Staff is preparing General (operating) Fund budget for FY 2010-2011 of approximately \$12.5 million. **In five years the Town's revenues have dropped by nearly 30% (or nearly \$5 million).** This drop in revenue has translated into service delivery impacts including program cuts, staffing reductions and very concerning deferrals of infrastructure maintenance.

Residents identified the Town's fiscal sustainability as the *Strategic Plan 2006-2010's* key focus. As we started this process, residents and stakeholders reminded us *again* that a financially healthy community is fundamental to our vitality and, frankly, our survival. Five years later and without a resolution to the Town's revenue shortfall, we are now faced with the reality that non-essential services might be eliminated, including the operation of our beloved Fountain.

The Town's current lack of financial stability will make implementing the Strategic Plan difficult. This will ultimately result in the citizen-defined vision and values being compromised. As such, **it is the principal recommendation of the Strategic Plan that Council re-initiate a process to review and recommend a financing structure and implement policies by which the Town's financial sustainability can be achieved.**



# VISION AND VALUES

## Our Vision

Fountain Hills is a distinctive community designed to invigorate the body, mind and spirit, and strives to:

- Be stewards of this unique enclave, dedicated to preserving the environment and visual aesthetic and to living in balance with the Sonoran Desert;
- Champion the diversity of experiences our residents bring to our community and rely on this depth of experience to innovatively address our challenges;
- Be economically sustainable and anchor our vitality in an active, vibrant town core that serves us culturally, socially and economically; and,
- Be civic-minded and friendly, taking responsibility for our Town's success by building partnerships and investing our talent and resources.

## Our Values

- Civility
- Civic Responsibility
- Environmental Stewardship
- Economic Vitality
- Education, Learning and Culture
- Maintain and Improve Community Infrastructure
- Public Safety, Health and Welfare
- Recreational Opportunities and Amenities

## CIVILITY

### Why is this important?

Residents value the friendly atmosphere in Fountain Hills; they love running into neighbors on a walk and being greeted by name at area merchants. Residents also value civility—while we encourage lively debate and engagement on a range of issues, we also expect to be treated with respect. Our community is one that values kindness and we should strive to celebrate and build from our differences instead of finding ways to fragment ourselves and politicize the issues facing our community.

### Our Pledge

Build a community in which all can feel valued, welcome and as though they belong.

### Strategic Directions

- C 1 Practice the art of civility in all public settings and encourage those around you to do the same.
- C 2 Support community events and activities that create opportunities to build community and friendship.
- C 3 Genuinely solicit and consider public and stakeholder feedback as part of the decision-making process.
- C 4 Be the friendliest place in the Valley.

### Key Performance Questions

- What is the overall atmosphere at public meetings and gatherings?
- Did we support events and activities that build community and friendship?
- Can we make connections between public and stakeholder feedback and the decisions that have been made?
- Have we made positive strides in establishing Fountain Hills' reputation as the friendliest place in the Valley?

## CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

### Why is this important?

With today's demands on people's time, it is a challenge to find ways to keep individuals engaged in their community. We live in a special place and to keep it that way will take more than just the local government. It will take the individual and collective commitments of residents and the business community.

The interaction of working, retired and winter residents, youth, and government strengthens our community. We value volunteers and encourage involvement at all levels because it builds partnerships and invests talent and resources in our Town.

### Our Pledge

Take responsibility for our community's future and foster opportunities for all residents to participate fully in our community through accessible, responsive leadership.

### Strategic Directions

- CR 1 Foster an environment of accessible, responsive governance.
- CR 2 Discover, recognize and utilize the talents of our citizens and use these assets to address community needs.
- CR 3 Foster a culture of public service and volunteerism.
- CR 4 Implement a comprehensive communications plan to encourage informed citizen participation in civic life.
- CR 5 Support and develop programs that educate and involve our youth in community governance.
- CR 6 Evaluate customer satisfaction with Town services on a regular basis and implement appropriate service improvements.
- CR 7 Communicate the role of local government and clearly define the trade-offs between service levels and amenities and the associated costs so residents can make informed choices.
- CR 8 Foster a dialogue with residents and businesses regarding the importance of investing in the community's infrastructure maintenance to protect property values and enhance the business climate.

## Key Performance Questions

- Have we improved government accessibility, responsiveness and service?
- Have we enabled our citizens to be critical thinkers and problem solvers in addressing community issues?
- Have we expanded our public service and volunteer base?
- Have we raised awareness in the community regarding the Town's operations?
- Have we effectively involved youth in community governance?

## ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

### Why is this important?

The community highly values both the small town atmosphere and the natural beauty of Fountain Hills. That combination is what differentiates us—what makes the Town unique. We are not just a small town, but a small town in a beautiful Sonoran desert setting. Much of the “beauty” is due to natural conditions: the desertscape, undulating topography, mountain views, big skies and star-filled nights.

### Our Pledge

Preserve the natural beauty that surrounds us and protect it so future generations can enjoy it.

### Strategic Directions

- ES 1 Educate residents about our environment to increase awareness and promote stewardship.
- ES 2 Protect and enhance natural infrastructure, including native vegetation, terrain and open space.
- ES 3 Explore and implement new technologies and opportunities that will minimize noise, air and light pollution and reduce energy consumption.
- ES 4 Promote water conservation and identify ways to use this precious desert resource wisely.
- ES 5 Protect selected view sheds from development and other manmade obstructions.
- ES 6 Improve access to the Sonoran Desert experience.

### Key Performance Questions

- Have we expanded environmental education efforts?
- Have we maintained and effectively implemented policies to protect the community’s natural beauty and resources?
- Have we improved connections between people and the Sonoran Desert?

## ECONOMIC VITALITY

### Why is this important?

Economic vitality is the primary tenant of the Strategic Plan because it is fundamental to all other projects, processes and goals for our future. The state's economic recovery will be gradual (at best) over the next decade and simply increasing retail commerce from all possible sources will not be sufficient to maintain the Town's aging infrastructure and provide recreation programs and amenities and public safety services at their present levels. The state's budget woes and imminent decrease in financial support to the Town will require Fountain Hills to identify funding mechanisms to allow our community to control its own destiny.

With that being said, the health of the local business community is still an integral part of economic vitality. Fountain Hills will require the implementation of business strategies that increase the number of "feet on the street": more employees, visitors, and most of all, more citizens patronizing our businesses. Implementation of the Downtown Vision Master Plan will advance the "Urban Village" concept, wherein more residents are able to live, work and play in Fountain Hills. In the process, we will need to identify and attract specific niche industries that employ skilled workers, as well as businesses that supply the needs that residents are now leaving the area to satisfy.

An additional challenge for the Town is the discrepancy between the number of "households" and the number of households with residents who are here for the majority of the year. As our present economic model depends heavily on sales taxes, attention must be paid to positioning Fountain Hills as the best suburb for families, with family growth supporting our schools, our multi-generational image, and the year-round collection of sales taxes in our retail and restaurant venues. This growth model should also support the Visitor's Bureau outreach to broaden the number of longer-term seasonal visitors who contribute far more to our economic base than "day trippers."

### Our Pledge

Maintain a strong commitment to financial stability and local control, and promote economic growth that leverages Fountain Hills' assets by building a dynamic, diverse economy that supports our community's needs and promotes successful businesses.

## Strategic Directions

- EV 1 Develop a comprehensive economic development strategy for the Town's future and work with our partners to forward economic growth and awareness.
- EV 2 Develop and maintain a balanced, equitable, sustainable and local financing structure to support the Town's core government services at desired service levels.
- EV 3 Promote a mixed use core where residents can live, work, learn and play in an urban village setting, as depicted in the Downtown Area Specific Plan (Downtown Vision Master Plan).
- EV 4 Promote retention, expansion and relocation of quality businesses.
- EV 5 Promote Fountain Hills as a visitor destination.
- EV 6 Identify a slate of economic development tools and strategies (including tax incentives, fee abatements, etc.) to stimulate economic growth.
- EV 7 Identify areas for redevelopment, revitalization or reuse.
- EV 8 Promote unique and vibrant neighborhood and business districts.
- EV 9 Promote the maintenance of an age-balanced population that will support the long-term sustainability of our community.
- EV 10 Define Fountain Hills' market niche and actively pursue opportunities that attract and retain high quality employment opportunities.

## Key Performance Questions

- Has progress been made in implementing a comprehensive economic strategy?
- Are our core services reliably funded?
- What steps have been taken to develop the central business district?
- Have we maintained a strong support system for local businesses?
- What new businesses have come to Fountain Hills?
- Have we brought more visitors to the community and provided more opportunities for them to spend money?
- Are local businesses investing in themselves?

## EDUCATION, LEARNING AND CULTURE

### Why is this important?

We place a high degree of importance on providing quality, continuing educational opportunities for all, and access to fine art and cultural amenities. Whether preparing our youth for a competitive workplace, supporting those needing to retool and transition, or enriching and expanding the experiences of our residents and visitors, quality education and cultural assets are not simply amenities, but priorities.

While the Town does not directly provide educational opportunities and many of the cultural amenities will be provided by others, it serves a key role in building partnerships that support the community's values in this area.

### Our Pledge

Support quality, lifelong learning opportunities and cultural assets that enrich our lives.

### Strategic Directions

- ELC 1 Partner with Fountain Hills' schools and other institutions to develop quality educational programming and opportunities.
- ELC 2 Support partners in providing arts and cultural opportunities and amenities.
- ELC 3 Promote and celebrate cultural diversity.
- ELC 4 Position the community's arts and cultural businesses, venues and amenities as economic drivers integrated into the Town's comprehensive economic strategy.
- ELC 5 Encourage access to higher learning opportunities or the establishment of an educational or training campus within our community.

### Key Performance Questions

- Have educational opportunities been expanded and student performance improved?
- Have arts and cultural opportunities and amenities been improved/expanded?
- Have arts and culture played a greater role in enhancing the local economy?



## MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

### Why is this important?

Fountain Hills is a beautiful place, but like everything else, it is aging. A significant amount of the community's infrastructure is reaching its fourth decade and the bill is coming due. Maintaining the building blocks of the community - basic services like water, sewer, stormwater, electricity, telecommunications and transportation - and protecting the community's investments and amenities is critical to the success of Fountain Hills. While the Town of Fountain Hills is not directly responsible for all of these tasks, it is the governmental body representing the Town's residents and businesses to ensure quality service and upkeep of local infrastructure.

The tasks that the Town is directly responsible for (maintaining community buildings and parks and recreation facilities, along with road, sidewalk, landscaping and trail maintenance) must be carefully planned and systematically and reliably funded. The most visible infrastructure is within the Town's control and is essential for our movement in and around Town. Well maintained streets are essential to not only the community's image, but can lower the need for very costly reconstruction as the system and community age.

### Our Pledge

Maintain and improve our infrastructure to ensure a high quality living experience, enhance economic opportunities, and support and protect property values and community investments.

### Strategic Directions

- I 1 Maintain a 5-year capital improvement plan that includes programmed maintenance projects.
- I 2 Lower the reliance on state revenues by developing a locally controlled, reliable funding source for infrastructure maintenance.
- I 3 Maintain a current condition assessment of all roadways and sidewalks and prioritize and implement maintenance efforts to minimize costly reconstruction.
- I 4 Partner with local civic and social organizations to assist in amenity upkeep and maintenance.
- I 5 Explore ways to reduce wear and tear on the transportation system including transit options and limiting of truck traffic.

- I 6 Coordinate closely with downtown development efforts to ensure adequate infrastructure is planned and amenities identified and programmed.
- I 7 Maintain an up-to-date impact fee structure and equitable development agreements to ensure new growth is not a burden on existing residents and businesses.
- I 8 Periodically meet with other community service providers to do joint planning and ensure that service providers can accommodate new customers resulting from growth without compromising service levels to existing residents and businesses.
- I 9 Build a protected fund to finance the major periodic maintenance of community facilities.

## Key Performance Questions

- Have we enhanced our infrastructure maintenance and financial planning?
- Have we effectively enlisted the assistance of community organizations and entities in maintaining our amenities?
- Have we strategically invested in infrastructure improvements that will spur economic growth?
- Have service levels been maintained across providers/clients?

# PUBLIC SAFETY, HEALTH AND WELFARE

## Why is this important?

Safety, health and welfare are typically the highest priorities of citizens. While the public sector cannot give complete assurance that it can protect people in absolute terms, it plays a major role toward achieving that goal through such approaches as regulation, public/private partnerships and government investment. Resource depletion, pollution and a declining quality of life erodes our feeling of safety and security, and diminishes our quality of life and overall welfare.

## Our Pledge

Protect the health and safety of our community and promote a high quality life.

## Strategic Directions

- P 1 Promote and enhance community-based partnerships in crime prevention, fire and emergency preparedness.
- P 2 Reduce risk and increase safety through 'community policing' and community-based fire prevention programs.
- P 3 Ensure appropriate service levels for public safety.
- P 4 Explore health and welfare opportunities, including the creation of a small hospital or a niche health-related service cluster.
- P 5 Support health and wellness instruction throughout the community.

## Key Performance Questions

- Has collaboration among public safety providers, citizens and neighborhoods been improved?
- Have we effectively monitored the desired public safety service levels of residents?
- Have health and wellness facilities and programs been expanded?

## RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND AMENITIES

### Why is this important?

Recreational activities are key elements of our community. A community that plays together stays together! The maintenance of a wide variety of recreation opportunities for all ages is important to our overall quality of life. Recreational activities, programs and facilities also assist in the relief of stress and the promotion of health. We want to be the most fun, fit and friendly community in the Valley!

### Our Pledge

Make Fountain Hills a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly community by contributing to healthy lifestyles, providing recreational and physical exercise opportunities to citizens, and taking advantage of Fountain Hills' closeness to the Sonoran Desert.

### Strategic Directions

- R 1 Offer a wide range of cost-effective and accessible programs and services for all ages to promote a healthy and active community.
- R 2 Provide an interconnected, multi-use trail, sidewalk and bicycle system that promotes active living, physical activity, education and appreciation of our parks and natural resources.
- R 3 Support local organizations in providing affordable quality programs to promote recreational, sports, fitness and wellness programs for all ages.
- R 4 Support community events and activities that create opportunities to build community and neighborhood identity.

### Key Performance Questions

- Have we improved choices and access for recreation activities?
- Have we improved our trail and bicycle system?
- Are our recreational activities and community events promoting community cohesiveness?